

EVALUATION AND PROMOTION WITHIN THE FOREIGN SERVICE

SUMMARY

Personnel within the Foreign Service are placed within one of five functional groups known as "cones". These cones form the structure for career progression of individual Foreign Service Officers, including those at executive levels. Selection Boards, one or more for every cone, meet annually to evaluate officers for promotion. Each Board places in rank-order all individuals under its purview and designates a certain percentage, established by the Director General of the Foreign Service, for promotion and "selection-out" (forced separation). A moratorium against the use of the selection-out process is in effect at the present time. Certain fundamental problems face the Foreign Service evaluation and promotion system:

- (1) Selection-out is being tested in court as a violation of due process guaranteed by the Fifth Amendment.
- (2) Serious imbalances exist between the number of Foreign Service Officers with requisite skills and the number of available positions in a cone.
- (3) Each cone does not necessarily have the same percentage of positions at a given grade level as another.

The Foreign Service, though functionally organized, uses a promotion and evaluation system that is not functionally oriented. Officer's qualifications are not assessed with respect to specific job openings but rather against those of other officers. Grade (promotion) is not closely linked with position necessary in a functional arrangement. As long as the Foreign Service continues to employ simultaneously two incompatible personnel management systems it will experience significant personnel problems.

GENERAL

The Foreign Service is divided into five major occupational areas: Political, Economic and Cultural, Consular, Administrative, and Special and Technical Affairs. With the exception of a few out of area assignments, the bulk of a Foreign Service Officer's (FSO's) career is spent within one of these five functional areas, called "cones". Each year, Selection Boards convene to assess those eligible for promotion within a cone. These boards are the heart of the evaluation and promotion system of the Foreign Service.

The major objectives of the Selection Boards are to:

- (1) identify and recommend for promotion all officers who merit advancement on the basis of their performance and potential.
- (2) recommend for administrative action those officers whose performance is unsatisfactory or substandard.
- (3) suggest ways to improve the Foreign Service's methods of personnel evaluation.

Prior to the beginning of a Selection Board's work, a set of "precepts" from the Director General of the Foreign Service is given to the Board. These directives outline specific points each Board should keep in mind and is responsible for carrying out. Evaluation of each officer, through review of all documents relating directly to performance, is made in the context of the precepts.

The Selection Boards are always requested to put in rank-order all FSOs reviewed by them. Of this group a certain percentage of the officers are recommended for promotion while others are designated for "selection-out" (forced separation). The percent of individuals selected-out varies from year to year and the form that the process takes is dependent on the tenure of the employee. Selection-out is not considered a substitute for separation for cause. Appeal may be made by means of a written rebuttal to the reasons given for an officer's selection-out. In addition, the files of all FSO's being selected-out are reviewed again by a special panel whose recommendation to the Secretary of State is necessary for such action to take place.

The Selection Boards also usually compile lists which cover items, such as, officers who should receive warning letters for poor performance, those who should not get a within "class" (grade) salary increase, and FSOs who could not be rated.

These basic Selection Board procedures are applied to all classes within all cones. There are no special procedures for management of executives.

The evaluation and promotion process just described has been subject to some publicity as an outgrowth of criticism of it from within the Foreign Service. The best-known complaint--about the selection-out process--was thrust again into the news by the filing of a class action suit in early July by two FSOs who had been tabbed for selection-out. Their suit, supported by the two employee organizations at the State Department, contends that the process is unconstitutional because it violates the Fifth Amendment requirement of due process. As a result a moratorium on the use of selection-out continues. Not

the first time such complaints have been raised, the suit dramatically points out the Foreign Service's continued inability to implement grievance procedures equal to the long established, decisively executed selection-out process.

More fundamental, if less publicized problems, have been raised about the cone system itself. There are serious imbalances between the number of FSOs with the required skills and the number of available positions in the functional cones. Only in the economic cone are officers and positions more or less in balance. Position structures within the various cones also are different. Each cone does not necessarily have the same percentage of positions at a given class level as another. The result is that unless some kind of proportionality is realized at each level, promotion and opportunities will continue to vary between cones, affecting the relative attractiveness and status of the cones.

In conclusion, the Foreign Service is faced with a very basic problem fostered by the simultaneous use of two incompatible personnel management systems. On the one hand, there is the organization of the Foreign Service along functional lines while on the other, officers are not evaluated for promotion with respect to specific positions in the functional structure. They are, instead, measured against the qualifications of a group fellow officers on an annual basis. The close correlation of grade (promotion) to job position and individual qualification necessary for proper exploitation of a functional organization does not exist.